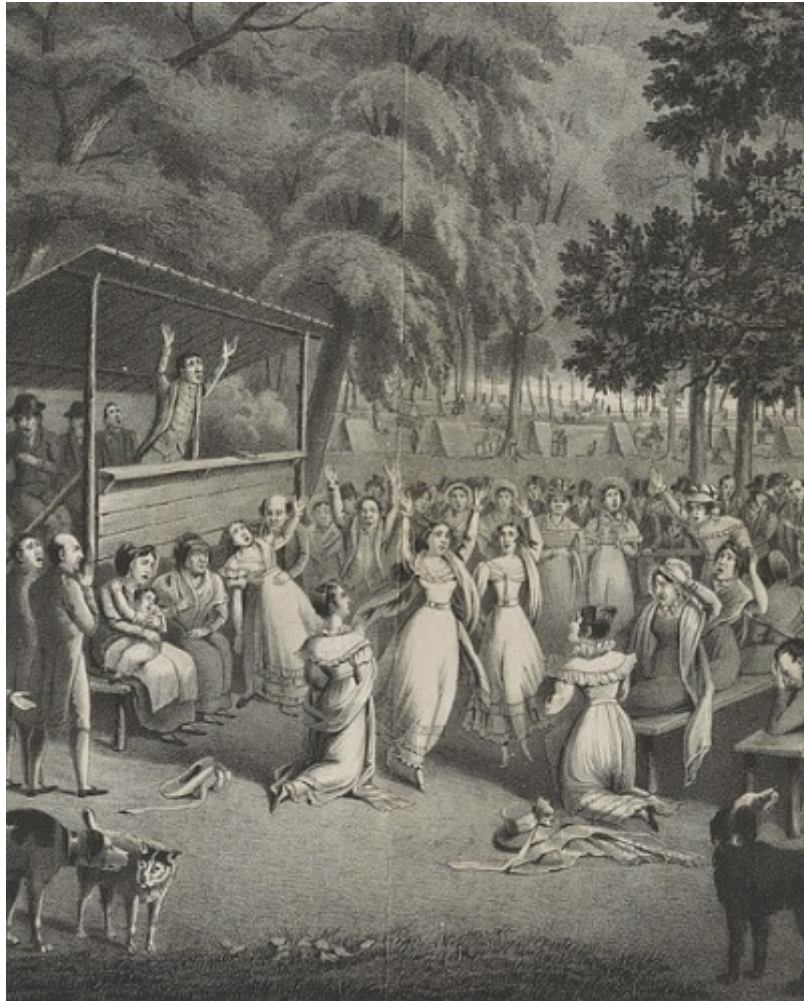


7 Christian men or movements who helped end slavery in America

John B. Carpenter

By [John B. Carpenter](#), Op-ed contributor Monday, June 19, 2023



Camp meeting during the Second Great Awakening. Bridport, Hugh, 1794-ca. 1868, lithographer | (Photo: Public Domain)

Here are seven Christian individuals or movements that helped end slavery in America.

1. The Quakers

The Quakers were the first. The first official protest by a church against slavery in America was the Germantown (now part of Philadelphia) Quaker Petition Against

Slavery in 1688. Soon, Rhode Island Quakers, led by Moses Brown (1738 -1836), pioneered freeing slaves; they founded the Providence Society for Abolishing the Slave Trade. John Woolman (1720-1772) devoted himself to campaigning against slavery, in 1754 writing *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes*. His work was carried on by Benjamin Lundy (1789-1833), who edited the magazine *Genius of Universal Emancipation*.

2. Samuel Sewall

Puritan Samuel Sewall (1652-1730), in Massachusetts, wrote [*The Selling of Joseph*](#) in 1700, one of the first anti-slavery books. Sewall showed how biblical passages that some in his day used to support slavery actually refute it. He declared, "It is most certain that all Men, as they are the Sons of Adam, are Coheirs; and have equal Right unto Liberty." Ironically, he's most remembered for being the presiding judge in the Salem Witchcraft trials for which he apologized.

3. Samuel Hopkins

Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), a disciple of Jonathan Edwards, while having held some household slaves himself, like his mentor, turned against slavery, leading his church to become the first recorded confessional church to openly preach against slavery. In 1776, Hopkins published a pamphlet entitled, "A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans" in which he referred to slaves as "our brethren and children." He declared that it was the duty of the new United States to free them. He later established a training school for freed slaves to become missionaries.

4. Jonathan Edwards the Younger

Jonathan Edwards (1745-1801) the younger was the son of a leader of the Great Awakening and the esteemed theologian who is now criticized for his owning slaves. The younger Edwards followed his father's theology and faith but not his acceptance of slavery. In 1773, he published his abolitionist views in a series of articles entitled "Some Observations upon the Slavery of Negroes" and "An Address to Americans, Upon Slave-Keeping." He preached passionately against slavery in a sermon entitled "The Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave trade" (September 15, 1791) based on Jesus' golden rule. Edwards' activism modeled for other ministers and abolitionists how to use Scripture to oppose slavery. In 1798, Robert Wilson, pastor of a church in South Carolina, wrote him for guidance. Wilson feared opposing slavery would get him prosecuted for sedition. Edwards' encouraged Wilson to stay in the ministry and undermine slavery. "We must not be

discouraged ... Light on that subject may be diffused gradually” in the South. After all, in Edwards’ youth Connecticut had been “in as great darkness concerning the rights of the Negroes, as South Carolina is now.”

5. Lyman Beecher

Lyman Beecher (1775 -1863) targeted slavery as one of the chief sins he aimed to eradicate in the new United States. In 1804 Beecher wrote, *The Practicality of Suppressing Vice by Means of Societies Instituted for that Purpose*. Around 1813, he founded the Connecticut Society for the Suppression of Vice and the Promotion of Good Morals. His strategy was to use voluntary societies to affect a moral revolution in America and one of the chief sins to be conquered was slavery. William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879) joined the church that Beecher pastored and was motivated by Beecher’s preaching to support of the American Antislavery Society, although Beecher was an incrementalist and Garrison was an “immediatist.” Beecher’s daughter, Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896), wrote the influential anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

6. Converts of the Second Great Awakening

The “Second Great Awakening” produced multitudes of American Christians who opposed slavery. The “Second Great Awakening” was actually the continuation and expansion of the evangelical awakening of the 1700s, begun under Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. Abolitionism was often part of revivals of the early 19th century. The Methodists grew enormously at this time. They were encouraged by their founder, John Wesley (1703-1791) to oppose slavery. In 1800, the Methodist General Conference declared that slavery was “repugnant to the unalienable rights of mankind, and to the very essence of civil liberty.” The Methodists produced spin-off denominations like the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church which, in 1839, licensed a preacher who became one of the most powerful voices for abolition: Frederick Douglass (c. 1817-1895). Also, Presbyterian revivalist Charles Finney (1792-1875) spread abolitionism along with his revivals. He wrote, “In my prayers and preaching, I so often alluded to slavery, and denounced it.”¹ Converts who held slaves were required to repent and free them. Finney stated, “Perpetrators [of slavery] cannot be fit subjects for Christian communion and fellowship.”² Finney influenced Theodore Weld (1803-1895) to oppose slavery. Weld would go on to recruit thousands of people to join the cause of abolition, co-write *America Slavery As It Is* (1839) with his wife Angelina Grimké (1805-1879) and her sister Sarah, and edit the magazine *TheEmancipator*.

7. Robert W. Fogel

Robert Fogel (1926-2013) isn't a Christian who helped end slavery but the foremost expert on slavery who found that Christians ended it. He won the 1993 Nobel in Economics for his research into American slavery. Though a professed "secular Jew," Fogel concluded that [Christians ended slavery](#). Fogel discovered that Southern slave plantations were 36% more efficient than free Northern farms. Thus slavery was not undone because of economic reasons but because evangelical Christians, like the Baptist Francis Weyland (1796-1865), turned the tide of popular opinion in America against it so that by 1860, Americans were willing to vote for an anti-slavery president, setting off the chain of events that would lead to Juneteenth.

1. Charles G. Finney, *Memoirs* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1876), 324.
2. Finney, Charles Grandison. *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, p. Lecture xv, Hindrances to Revivals.

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